

MARKING TWO DECADES OF “FRAMES OF CHOICE”

By André B. Sobocinski, historian, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery



*Navy optometrist fits Marine Recruit with “BCGs” at Parris Island
December 21, 1987.
(Photo courtesy of BUMED archives)*

This year the Navy marks an important milestone in the history of military-issue eyewear.

- Twenty years ago the military’s bespectacled masses were finally freed from the optical burdens of the standard issue. .

The S9 (male) and S8 (female) standard issue glasses could be called something of an “eye sore.” The thick-brown acetate frames were dated and made the condition of nearsightedness a stark reminder for the wearer. Some Sailors even risked performing their day-to-day functions sight-impaired rather than display the eyewear in public.

Vice Adm. Harold Koenig became Navy surgeon general in 1995 with the goal of giving service personnel the choice to choose their own frames. Under Koenig’s direction, the Naval Ophthalmic Support and Training Activity (NOSTRA) organized a pilot program aboard the ships USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN-71) and USS Mount Whitney (LCC-20), giving Sailors the choice of 12 different frame styles—the matte aviator, submariner, a variety of “off-the-shelf” civilian plastic and metal frames as well as the dreaded standard issue. As expected, participants chose every frame but the standard issue.

So was born “Frames of Choice,” a novel program whereby the Navy would allow service members to select stylish frames in lieu of the standard issue, while ultimately ensuring they would actually wear the prescriptions they were given.

Despite initial push-back and concerns over the cost, the program was adopted by the other services and today is still the standard by which the Department of Defense dispenses eye glasses.
